

In the 1950s, there were about 16 workers paying for every Social Security beneficiary. Today, there are about three. And eventually, there will only be two workers per beneficiary. These changes single a looming danger. In the year 2018, for the first time ever, Social Security will pay out more in benefits than the Government collects in payroll taxes. And once that line into the red has been crossed, the shortfalls will grow larger with each passing year. By the time today's workers in their mid twenties begin to retire, the system will be bankrupt, unless we act to save it.

A crisis in Social Security can be averted if we in Government take our responsibilities seriously and work together today. I came to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I campaigned on a promise to reform and preserve Social Security, and I intend to keep that promise.

I have set forth several broad principles to guide our reforms. First, nothing will change for those who are receiving Social Security and for those who are near retirement. Secondly, we must not increase payroll taxes, because higher taxes would slow economic growth. And we must tap into the power of compound interest, by giving younger workers the option to save some of their payroll taxes in a personal account, a nest egg they can call their own, which Government cannot take away.

Saving Social Security for future generations will not be easy. If it were easy, it would have already been done. There will be costs, yet the costs of continued inaction are unacceptable. And the longer we wait, the more difficult it will be to fix the system. Saving Social Security will require bipartisan cooperation and the courage of leaders in both parties. The American people voted for reform in 2004, and now they expect us to work together and deliver on our promises. I look forward to working with Members of Congress on this important issue. Together we will make certain that America meets its duty to our seniors and to our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on December 10 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Exchange With Reporters in Bethesda, Maryland

December 11, 2004

Visit With Wounded Troops/President's Health

Q. How are you feeling, Mr. President?

The President. I'm—first of all, incredibly impressed by the health care that our military receives. I have just come from visiting with some of the wounded and their families, and the service that the doctors and nurses provide here for our troops is superb. It is such an honor to see those who have been put themselves—who have been injured and are now fighting back and recovering and seeing their spirit and their strength. And it's an uplifting experience to come here.

I can say to the loved ones in the military that their sons and daughters and husbands and wives get the very best medical care there is, and I am grateful for that.

As far as my own physical goes, I'm still standing. I, obviously, have just gone through a campaign, because—let me say, I've obviously gone through a campaign where I probably ate too many doughnuts, if you get my drift. My New Year's resolution has become apparent after getting on the scales. And although I think the doc will put out a report that shows you that I'm physically fit and still able to get on the stress tests, I'm a little overweight. And therefore, I fully intend to lose some inches off my waistline and some pounds off my frame. But other than that, I'm feeling great.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:42 p.m. at the National Naval Medical Center. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

**Remarks on the Nomination of
Michael O. Leavitt To Be Secretary
of Health and Human Services**

December 13, 2004

The President. Thank you. Good morning. I am pleased to announce the nomination of Michael O. Leavitt as the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Last year I welcomed Mike to my Cabinet as the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. In that office, he has enforced high standards and a spirit of cooperation and with good common sense. He has upheld this administration's commitment to sustain improvements in the quality of the natural environment. He has managed the EPA with skill and with a focus on results. I've come to know Mike as a fine executive, as a man of great compassion. He is an ideal choice to lead one of the largest departments of the United States Government.

The Department of Health and Human Services touches the life of every person in this country. From the safety of our food and medicine to the Medicare program to preparing for any kind of health emergency, HHS has comprehensive responsibilities for the health of Americans. To meet those responsibilities, the Department needs many thousands of skilled professionals and a leader who is able to act on many fronts all at once.

For the last 4 years, HHS has served the American people extremely well under the energetic leadership of Tommy Thompson. Early in his tenure, our Nation went on a wartime footing and had to prepare for emergencies of a kind never seen before. Secretary Thompson led the effort to prepare the medical infrastructure for any terrorist challenge.

At the same time, he has presided over dramatic increases in medical research, adding to the promise of hopeful new cures. He's helped set in motion major improvements in Medicare, which will benefit seniors all across America. He has worked closely with State and local officials to ensure that public health programs function as effectively as possible. And throughout his career as Governor and as Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tommy Thompson has led efforts

to reform welfare laws and to help more people transition from welfare to work. Tommy Thompson is a good friend who has given every day of the last 38 years to public service. As he and Sue Ann move on to new challenges, Tommy has my deep gratitude for a job well done.

My new nominee for HHS Secretary, like Tommy Thompson, served many years as a Governor. The people of Utah elected Mike Leavitt to three terms, and during his administration, Utah was named one of the best managed State governments in the country. Governor Leavitt was a leader in welfare reform, resource management, and environmental stewardship. He improved child welfare services in the State and made strides toward expanding access to health care for children. He made government services more accessible through the Internet, and he always insisted that the government remain accountable to the people it serves.

When confirmed by the Senate, Mike Leavitt will be charged with a broad agenda for the health and safety of the American people. In this new term, we will implement the first-ever prescription drug benefit for seniors under Medicare. We will expand Federal cooperation with faith-based groups that provide essential services, such as counseling and treatment for addictions. We will continue pursuing the great promise of medical research, always ensuring that the work is carried out with vigor and moral integrity. We will not relent in our efforts to protect the American people from disease and the use of disease as a weapon against us.

Mike Leavitt is the right leader to lead HHS in meeting all these vital commitments. I thank him for accepting this new responsibility. I also thank his wife, Jackie, and their son Westin for being with us today. I urge the Senate to confirm Governor Leavitt's nomination as soon as possible.

Congratulations.

[At this point, Secretary-Designate Leavitt made brief remarks.]

The President. Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary-Designate